UNITED NATIONS

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General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/47/745
1 December 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-seventh session
Agenda item 60

CHEMICAL AND BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) WEAPONS

Letter dated 25 November 1992 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you a statement issued by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. R. F. Botha, on 24 November 1992, announcing the South African Government's decision to become an original signatory to the draft Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 60.

(Signed) V. R. W. STEWARD
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Statement issued by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. R. F. Botha, on 24 November 1992, announcing the South African Government's decision to become an original signatory to the draft Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction

The Cabinet has decided that South Africa will become an original signatory to the draft Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (Chemical Weapons Convention). A South African delegation will be present at the official signing ceremony in Paris from 13 to 15 January 1993. The South African delegation will be headed by Mr. R. F. Botha, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Africa.

The Chemical Weapons Convention was finalized at the end of August 1992 by the Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons of the United Nations Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, where South Africa has participatory observer status. On 3 September 1992, the Conference on Disarmament referred the draft Convention to the United Nations General Assembly for endorsement. It is expected that the General Assembly will endorse the draft Convention before the end of this year.

South Africa is a party to the Geneva Protocol of 1925, a/ as well as to the 1972 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. b/ The Chemical Weapons Convention goes far beyond the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which only bans the offensive use of chemical weapons. The Chemical Weapons Convention bans the development, production, acquisition, storage, transfer and stockpiling of chemical weapons, and requires the destruction of existing chemical weapons. The draft Convention makes provision for comprehensive verification measures. These include challenge inspections and routine verifications in the chemical industry.

The decision to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention in January 1993 is an expression of the South African Government's wish to participate in international non-proliferation and disarmament initiatives. It is also a logical extension of its previous commitments to international non-proliferation initiatives.

On 9 January 1989, at the Paris Conference of States Parties to the 1925 Geneva Protocol and Other Interested States on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. R. F. Botha, expressed South Africa's support for negotiations on a global ban on chemical weapons. He said that chemical technology and the conduct of warfare had both been transformed since the adoption of the Geneva Protocol. It was thus not surprising that suggestions had been made that a truly international convention banning the use of chemical weapons was sorely needed. He

commented: "To be effective, such a convention would need to be comprehensive, global and verifiable".

South Africa is fully aware of its regional and global responsibilities, of which non-proliferation and disarmament are important facets. A country's desire to contribute to global peace and security is evidenced, amongst other steps, by its adherence to multilateral treaties, conventions and protocols in the field of security and the control of weapons of mass destruction. Increasing international concern about the spread of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery has resulted in various non-proliferation regimes coming into existence.

South Africa acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons on 10 July 1991 and, two months later, on 16 September 1991, concluded a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). These steps illustrate South Africa's commitment to the peaceful use of nuclear energy and underscore the South African Government's desire to contribute to the achievement of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in southern Africa.

Furthermore, South Africa already adheres to the Guidelines of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). As far as national non-proliferation control measures are concerned, a Draft Bill on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction was recently published in the Government Gazette. It is expected that the bill will be tabled in Parliament next year.

Notes

a/ League of Nations, Treaty Series, vol. XCIV (1929), No. 2138.

b/ General Assembly resolution 2826 (XXVI), annex.